

The Native's Return by Louis Adamic, 1934. Thirty-two pages of photos.

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If you are descended from a south-Slavic immigrant, this book is a rare opportunity to get inside the head of your immigrant ancestor, especially if they were living in the U.S. in the 1920s or 1930s.

The author was born in Carniola (part of Slovenia today) in 1898. He immigrated to the U.S. at the age of 14. At the age of 31 he received a Guggenheim Fellowship to travel back to the Balkans to spend a year there traveling and writing about his experiences. This book is the result.

He traveled all over the area, first to Dubrovnik, then up to his home in Carniola. After visiting his family, later travels took him back down the eastern Adriatic coast to Montenegro, and over a 10-month period to Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia, and the cities of Zagreb and Belgrade. He met King Alexander in Belgrade toward the end of his trip.

This presentation of the book in PDF format on Archive.org is completely searchable. Click the search icon in the upper left corner. Within the book, there are no Croatian letters with diacritical marks. But a word on the unusual spellings might be in order. For example: Chilipi (Čilipi), Kossovo (Kosovo) Riyeka (Rijeka), Racitch Memorial (Račić Memorial), Shibenik (Šibenik), Mestrovitch (Meštrović), Korchula (Korčula), Nish (Niš), Raditch (Radić), Skoplye (Skoplje), Zara (Zadar), Galichnik (Galičnik), Zupanchich (Župančič). If you do not use these unusual spellings you will not find what you are searching for. On the other hand, you might just read the entire book. You will not be sorry.

Mr. Adamic writes well, and has a good grasp of the social and cultural conditions of the regions he visits. Unique and perceptive insights can be found throughout the book. For example:

On page 9: "In Dubrovnik – unlike in Lisbon, Gibraltar, Naples, and Palermo [ports his ship had visited prior to Dubrovnik], no one forced himself upon us to sell us something. Here no guides were offering their services; there were no shift-eyed peddlers... In the little bazaars, where business evidently was poor, the men and women in charge of the stores seemingly did not care whether the passers-by stopped to look at and buy their handmade [goods] or not..."

On page 149: "...the Dalmatian Croats are rather different from the Croats of Croatia proper. The latter...are for the most part a mild-eyed, blond, or brown-haired people, patient, subdued, ponderous, truly peasant, not easily articulate, whereas most of the Dalmatians along the Adriatic are dark and spirited. It takes a lot of abuse and injustice to stir an inland Croat to indignation or fight; the Dalmatian, on the other hand, is apt to flare up the moment he suspects some one is trying to hand him the dirty end of the stick..." He then goes on to explain reasons for the difference.

A well-described and succinct history of the Ragusian Republic starts on page 150, morphing into a similar description of Konavle which continues to page 161.

A very interesting explanation and description of how the nobility of Ragusa "deliberately committed a slow suicide" after they became subjects of Austria can be found on page 155.